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ABSTRACT

This programmed text for self-study provides information on conflict resolution in the workplace. Part of a series of such texts, the book presents examples of familiar situations involving work-related conflicts. The text then discusses two possible answers and explains why one or the other is appropriate for conflict resolution. Through such situations, the book explains the five-step "Solve" process of conflict resolution: (1) Share the thoughts and feelings involved in the conflict; (2) Obtain a list of possible solutions; (3) Locate the best possible solution that will satisy mutual needs; (4) Validate the conflict-resolving process by implementing the solution; and (5) Evaluate the implemented solution by following up on it. The text is illustrated with cartoon drawings. (KC)

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COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR CAREER SUCCESS

A Programmed Textbook

Book III: Conflict Resolution

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In the previous sections you have learned that your use of the skills of active listening and assertive communication encourages accurate and mutual understandings of the thoughts, feelings, and needs between you and your co-workers. Additionally, by fostering greater degrees of trust and openness, these skills strengthen your working relationships with others. Sounds pretty good--almost as if effective communication will solve and even prevent all of your problems and conflicts at work!

The various skills of effective communication <u>will</u> go a long way in resolving, and even preventing, many of your conflicts with your co-workers. But even when the use of active listening and assertive communication is the rule rather than the exception in your working relationships, conflicts will arise.

Turn now to page 139.

We have asserted that even when the use of active listening and assertive communication is the rule rather than the exception in your working relationships, conflicts will still arise. Choose from among the answers printed below that you think best explains why this is so, and then turn to the page indicated by your answer.

A. Simply because we are human beings, working with other human beings in an ever-changing work environment, conflicts will arise from time to time, regardless of the effectiveness of our communication. Turn to page 140.

B. No matter how well developed our listening and assertion skills, we will always run across some bull-headed, stubborn people at work with whom we will have to "do battle." Turn to the top of page 141.

C. If everyone at work had a good understanding of and practiced the skills of active listening and assertive communication, there would be no conflicts at work. Turn to the bottom of page 141.

A.....Very good! You remembered that wherever we work and whatever our job may be, we will experience problems and conflicts at one time or another. Simply because we are human beings with varying feelings and needs, working in an ever-changing environment with other human beings, there will be conflicts from time to time, regardless of the effectiveness of our communication. And in almost all cases there will be two aspects to every conflict we will have with our co-workers on the job. First, there is the specific, job-related problem that must be resolved. Second, there is the relationship-oriented aspect of the conflict. Sometimes the conflicts we will have at work will involve real problems, and other times we may feel or perceive that a conflict exists between us and a co-worker. Whether conflicts at work are actual or perceived, if we employ the skills of active listening, assertive communication, and other conflict resolution skills to be outlined in this book, we will become more adept at resolving both the specific problem involved in each conflict and the relationship-oriented aspect of the problem. And, as an added bonus, we will be able to turn such conflicts into healthy and productive experiences at work. How can this be so? Turn to page 142 to find out!

B.....No, this is not the best answer to our question, although you will indeed often encounter stubborn people at work with whom you will have to deal. Sometimes you may avoid conflict with such people by choosing not to "do battle" with them; "doing battle" with these kinds of co-workers is not always necessary since such competitive wars require two or more people to become involved in the fight. But you will not always be able to avoid such conflicts. The skills of active listening and assertive communication will go a long way in resolving these conflicts and preventing future problems. But even if you are able to encourage your more stubborn co-workers to learn and practice these skills, conflicts will still arise which you and your co-workers will need to resolve. Turn back now to the question on page 139 and try another answer.

C.....This would be an ideal situation, of course, but it is pretty far from reality. There are so many constantly changing aspects of your work environment, not to mention the "humanness" of you and your co-workers, that some conflicts will be inevitable. Turn back to the question on page 139 and try to find a better answer.

Let's go back to the situation between George and Susan, described in Book I, to illustrate the point that conflicts at work can be both healthy and productive. Remember that they were experiencing a conflict concerning the implementation of Susan's department into production. However, another conflict exists between George and Susan, one involving their working relationship. The point here is that regardless of the specific problem of implementing new drawings into production, the conflict in George and Susan's working relationship may impede the resolution of this and other specific problems, and could create even more difficulties. For instance, their inability to effectively resolve this problem has resulted in their having to defer the sclution of their problem to their supervisors. The supervisors are not likely to be pleased with having to spend time to deal with something which Susan and George might have settled on their own had they been more effective communicators and conflict resolvers. If George and Susan were able to effectively resolve this and future conflicts in their working relationship, they would become better able to resolve and prevent future problems. Also, by concentrating on cooperation rather than competition, they could become more likely to generate new ways to productively integrate the operation of their two departments.

Now turn to page 143.

From our illustration of the conflict between George and Susan, you can see that although conflicts at work will always occur, the ways in which people deal with them largely determines their destructive or constructive impact on work situations. By dealing effectively with both the specific problems and the relationship-oriented aspects of conflict situations, we can turn our conflicts at work into potential strengtheners of our relationships with co-workers. In so doing we will become able to prevent specific difficulties from becoming larger problems, and we can even use the conflict situation to stimulate new ideas and better ways to do our jobs.

Let's stop for a moment to check on your understanding of the material presented so far. Answer "true" or "false" to the statement printed below, and then turn to the page indicated.

> In order to make sure that our relationships with our co-workers will improve and strengthen, sometimes we may find it necessary to give in to our co-workers' arguments, and let them win the conflict.

True.....turn to page 144.

False.....turn to page 145.

True. Well, this is a fairly typical way of resolving conflicts--in a sense, accepting a loss of some conflicts in order to improve relations with a co-worker and waiting for a more important time to win an argument at work when it seems really necessary. Giving in and occasionally letting a co-worker "win" may solve the immediate and specific job-related problem. But what about the relationship oriented aspects of the conflict: if your co-worker "wins" this one, then you must "lose;" or, if you win, then your co-worker loses. Assessing the outcomes of conflicts in terms of wins and losses tends to polarize relationships, establishing you and those with whom you work as competitors in future conflicts. We shall have more to say about viewing conflict at work as competition shortly. For now, you should understand that giving in or intentionally losing an argument with a co-worker is not likely to strengthen your working relationship with that person, but, as the resentment of the "loser" builds, your relationship is likely to weaken. Now turn back to the question on page 143 and try the other answer.

False. Very good! You remember from previous discussion that all of us have similar needs on the job: we all need for others to understand and accept our thoughts, feelings, and needs. This is especially true and important when conflicts arise at work. If we give in and let the other person "win," we are not likely to feel that he or she has understood or accepted our position. No matter how positive our intentions in letting the other person win in the conflict (trying to strengthen the working relationship, for example), the fact remains that if someone "wins," someone else must "lose." Instead of strengthening the working relationship, the relationship between you and your co-worker is weakened since resentment builds in the loser.

Unfortunately, many times people with whom we work view conflict as a competitive exercise in which there must always be winners and losers. Undoubtedly, you've heard phrases exemplifying this point of view such as "I just let him walk all over me," "How can we ever expect to win if the boss never backs us up," and "Win a few, lose a few--I'll just try to win the big ones from now on." In all of these cases a specific problem may be solved, for better or for worse, but the working relationship will suffer and weaken.

Turn now to page 146 for a closer look at this widely adopted win-lose style of conflict resolution.

The competitive, win-lose approach to conflict resolution can take many forms. For example, some people try to avoid conflict at any cost since they view all conflicts as potential losing situations and destructive of their self-esteem. Such people see conflict as useless and hopeless and, in their preoccupation with absolute harmony with co-workers, miss the relationship strengthening opportunities which the use of effective communication and conflict resolution skills provide. Then there are the "tough battler" people in the office who look at conflict situations as opportunities to increase power, status, and self-image. Such people usually feel that since there will be winners in the conflict situations, there are going to be losers, as well. They want to be winners at any cost.

These are the extreme characteristics of persons who adopt a win-lose approach to conflict resolution; you will find many people at work who change from one style to another or select an in-between position on this continuum. On page 147, we have provided you with a brief scenario to illustrate these two styles of conflict resolution. In this scenario John is the Director of Personnel of a small manufacturing company which has just begun to grow very rapidly as a result of receiving several large government contracts. Our other character is Mary, John's assistant in charge of recruitment. Mary has been working to persuade John to consider employing several women for some of the new supervisory positions made available by the company's recent expansion. On page 147 their dialogue begins....

Mary: John, these women would be just perfect--they've had more than enough schooling for these positions. All they lack is a little experience.

John: I don't think they'd work out, Mary. Women shouldn't be put in positons supervising men, especially in a plant like ours. It just wouldn't work--the men wouldn't buy it.

Mary: Well, you're wrong...but you know where I stand on this...even if what you are saying were true, then it's time that things were changed!

John: Forget it, Mary. Take your crusade somewhere else. I'm the Director of Personnel around here and you'll forget about hiring women for these jobs whether you like it or not!

Mary: Well, okay...I don't like it, but I just am not going to fight with you about it...you win.

John: Good! I'm glad that's settled and that we were able to work it out.

Now turn to page 148 for a closer look at this conflict between John and Mary.

The conflict between John and Mary concerning the hiring of women to fill supervisory positions in the company has been resolved, at least temporarily. But what of the way in which the conflict was resolved?

Answer "true" or "false" to the statement printed below that describes how John and Mary may feel about their working relationship as a result of the way in which they approached their conflict.

> Although the specific problem may have been at least temporarily solved, both John and Mary are likely to feel somewhat uncomfortable with their relationship as a result of the way they approached the conflict.
>
> True.....turn to page 149.
>
> False.....turn to page 150.

O.K., YOU WIN. I GIVE UP.
I'M BOSS AROUND HERE!!
WHAT'S SHE GOT UP HER SLEEVE?

True. Good! This is the correct answer to the question. Since John and Mary did not really listen to each other or openly express their thoughts and feelings concerning the issue, neither is likely to feel understood or accepted by the other. As a result, while the specific problem of hiring women for the supervisory positions may or may not surface again, John and Mary's relationship has somewhat weakened. Mary may feel resentment from the way John resorted to using the power of his position to settle their dispute. In one sense, power provokes counterpower: Mary may now subtly look for ways to get around John's current decision. John may now have to enforce his power-determined outcome of the conflict. Or, since power doesn't genuinely influence another person, but merely forces that person to behave in prescribed ways, John may find Mary becoming somewhat reluctant or less motivated in meeting other responsibilities in her job. Additionally, John may be thinking to himself, "Mary gave in too easily--I wonder what she has up her sleeve," thereby giving rise to mistrust in their working relationship. Because John and Mary approached their conflict in competitive terms of winning and losing, instead of in cooperative efforts to work through the conflict together, their working relationship has suffered, setting the stage for more potentially destructive conflicts. Now turn to page 151 for a final look at this win-lose approach to conflict resolution.

False. No, this is not the best answer to the question. In the first place, neither John nor Mary is likely to really understand each other's position in their conflict or feel accepted and understood by the other, since neither of them used the skills of active listening and assertive communication. Since both John and Mary were viewing their conflict in terms of winning or losing, both tried to manipulate the other instead of genuinely listening and openly expressing their thoughts and feelings. In the end, John resorted to using the power of his position to win the agrument and Mary gave in to that power. Even though the specific matter of hiring women for supervisory positions may or may not surface again, John and Mary are likely to feel dissatisfied with the outcome of their conflict. Their working relationship has weakened as a result of the way in which they approached their differences. Now turn back to the question on page 148 and try the other answer.

Effectively resolving conflicts that we may have at work depends upon our addressing both the specific problem and our relationship with the person with whom we are experiencing the conflict. Unless we pay close attention to both of these aspects of our job-related conflicts, neither we nor our co-workers will be likely to feel satisfied with the outcomes of our conflict situations. The illustration of the conflict between John and Mary clearly points out the negative impact which the win-lose approach to conflict resolution has on these two aspects of conflict situations at work.

Turn to page 152 to see what we mean.

FINISH

First, by the very definition of the win-lose approach, there must be a "loser" in the resolution of the conflict. That person is not likely to enthusiastically implement the decision of the "winner" of the conflict. In fact, the winner may even find enforcement of that outcome necessary. So while this approach to conflict resolution may generate solutions to problems, very often these are not the best solutions.

More important, however, is the effect that the win-lose style of conflict resolution has on the relationship between the persons experiencing the problem. In the competitive, win-lose approach there develops a very clear "me versus you" distinction, rather than a "we versus the problem" cooperative effort. Energies which could be combined in a mutual effort in solving the problem are instead diverted against each person locked into the win-lose approach; each person considers only his or her view--there is no mutual recognition of common goals or needs in the conflict situation. The win-lose approach to conflict resolution, therefore, tends to polarize people and weaken their relationships at work.

Now turn to page 153 to begin learning about more effective conflict resolution skills.

Resolving the conflicts that you may have with your co-workers in such a way that will resolve the specific problems, strengthen your relationships with them, and turn such conflicts into healthy and productive experiences at work, involve various skills and behaviors comprising a five stage conflict resolution process. These five stages spell the word:

S...O...L...V...E

S.....Share the thoughts, feelings, and needs involved in the conflict.

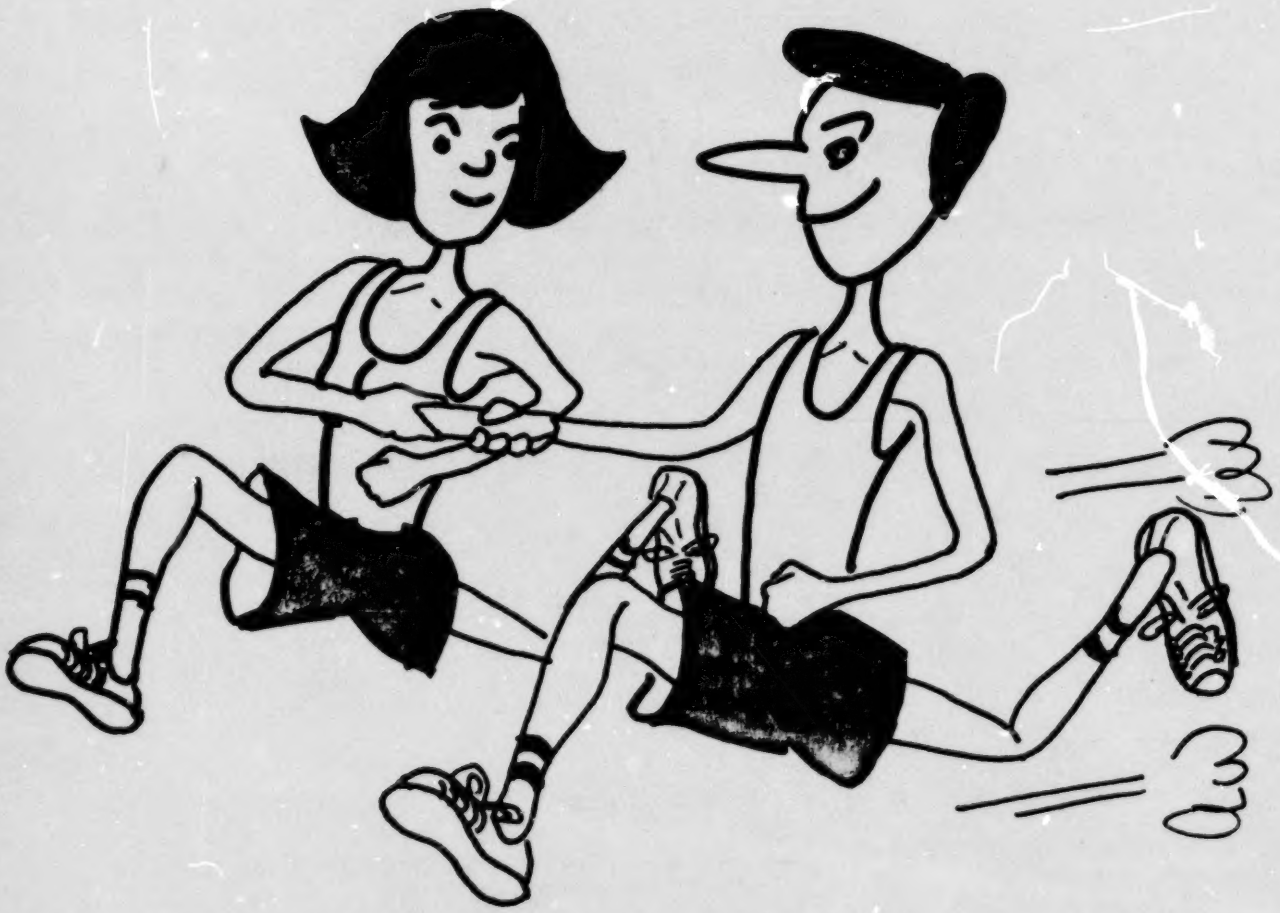
O.....Obtain a list of all possible solutions to the conflict.

L.....Locate the best possible solution that will satisfy mutual needs.

V.....Validate the conflict-resolving process by implementing the solution.

E.....Evaluate the implemented solution by following up on it.

Now turn to page 154.



The "SOLVE" conflict resolution process, unlike the win-lose approach to conflict resolution, is designed to first recognize and then to meet the needs and goals of all of the persons experiencing the conflict. In a sense, this method of conflict resolution is a "WIN-WIN" or a "NO-LOSE" method. In reducing preoccupations with winning or fears of losing, this approach to conflict resolution is a cooperative effort, instead of a competitive battle, between the persons experiencing the problem. As a result, this method discourages resentment and encourages motivation of both people to implement the solution generated by the process. Therefore, not only will the specific problem of the conflict be resolved, but the working relationship between the co-workers will improve as well.

The remainder of this program will be devoted to identifying the skills and behaviors associated with each of the five stages of this method of conflict resolution.

Now turn to page 155 for a closer look at the first, and most important, stage of conflict resolution.

S.....SHARE THE THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, AND NEEDS INVOLVED IN THE CONFLICT.

Setting the stage for the effective resolution of the conflicts that you may have with your co-workers depends upon a sharing of the thoughts, feelings, and needs involved in the conflict situation. Unless you and the person with whom you are experiencing the conflict first genuinely understand each other's position, there probably won't be a cooperative effort in resolving that conflict satisfactorily. If you and your co-worker are not satisfied with the outcome of the conflict, then your solution to the problem will probably be either forgotten or ignored by one or both of you--and your working relationship is likely to weaken.

Stop now and think about the most recent conflict that you have had with another person. In addition to your needing to find a practical solution to the problem, what did you and that other person really need from each other while you were experiencing your conflict? Think about this question for a moment and then turn to page 156.

THOUGHT
FEELINGS

When we experience conflicts with other people, we hope to find a solution to the problem that will really work. In addition, each of us experiencing the conflict wants to have our ideas, feelings, and needs recognized and understood by the other person. Also, we want to know where the other person stands; we don't want to be left in the dark concerning his or her position in the conflict.

In order to make sure that the person with whom we are having the conflict understands our position as accurately as possible, we need to employ the skills of assertive communication. By expressing ourselves assertively in our conflicts the other person does not have to guess our thoughts, feelings, or needs. Therefore, we can feel confident that we have done all that is possible for him or her to understand our position in the conflict situation.

In order to make sure that we have understood the position of the other person with whom we are experiencing a conflict--and communicate that understanding--we need to employ the skills of active listening. In so doing, the other person will be likely to feel that his or her thoughts, feelings, and needs have been both recognized and understood by us and that he or she has been truly "heard" in the conflict situation.

Now turn to page 157 for a review of the material presented at this point.

For our review of the material presented so far, answer "true" or "false" to the statement printed below and then turn to the page indicated.

> Shifting back and forth between the skills of assertive communication and active listening in this first stage of conflict resolution may not lead to a workable solution, but it is still the most important phase of the process since it keeps the working relationship intact.

True.....turn to page 158.

False.....turn to page 159.

True. You are partially correct; the skills of active listening and assertive communication will help you and the person with whom you are experiencing a conflict keep your relationship intact during the process of resolution. By assertively stating your needs in the conflict and then proving to the other person that you both recognize and understand his or her feelings and needs, you will develop an open and cooperative atmosphere, which is essential in solving the conflict situation. You and your co-worker will move through the remaining stages of conflict resolution on a basis of mutual understanding. But the skills of active listening and assertive communication contribute to the conflict resolution process in another way, as well. These skills not only keep the relationship intact during the conflict, but they also actively assist other problem-solving aspects of conflict resolution. Go back to the question on page 157 and try the other answer.

False. Very good! This answer is correct. Not only do the skills of active listening and assertive communication keep the relationship between you and your co-workers intact during the conflict, but they also actively contribute to other problem-solving aspects of conflict resolution.

You have learned previously that the skills of active listening and assertive communication actually improve existing communication between you and your co-workers by making your communication more open, trustful, and honest. Very clearly, such communication becomes especially important when you and your co-workers are in the midst of conflict situations.

Now turn to page 160 to learn more about what the skills of active listening and assertive communication accomplish during this first stage of conflict resolution.

Shifting back and forth between active listening and assertive communication--and encouraging the other person to do the same--accomplishes three things which are central to the conflict resolution process. First, these skills do indeed keep the relationship between you and your co-workers intact, both during and after the conflict. Remember, you may not always be able to resolve every specific problem that arises, but you will always have to live with the remaining working relationship. Second, these skills will help you identify exactly where the real conflict exists between you and the other person. Since some conflicts at work are based upon misinformation and misunderstanding, they may be perceived and not actual conflicts. Active listening and assertive communication will point out these faulty perceptions and resolve the "conflict" in this first stage. If, however, your conflict is not just perceived, the skills of active listening and assertive communication will allow you and the other person to decide jointly what the problem is and to identify the major obstacles in the way of that problem's resolution. Finally, using the skills of active listening and assertive communication will not only create, but also sustain, the effective communication which is so essential in all of the four remaining stages of the conflict resolution process. Now turn to page 161 for a closer look at the process of jointly identifying the conflict, using the skills of active listening and assertive communication.

Perhaps the best way of helping you to understand how the skills of active listening and assertive communication enable you and your co-workers to jointly identify your conflict and set the stage for its effective resolution is to provide you with an illustration of these skills in action.

Margaret has been the manager of a retail furniture store for several years and Linda was hired a few months ago as an assistant manager-trainee. For years Margaret has adopted, and incorporated into her training program, a rather traditional, fast-talking sales presentation. Linda likes her new job very much, but she is discovering that a lower-key approach to sales, which is quite different from Margaret's style, works best for her.

Turn to page 162 where Margaret begins their conversation.

Margaret: Linda, I've been watching you lately...I think that you need to put more enthusiasm into your sales talk--I'm concerned that you're not doing it like I've been training you (ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION).

Linda: You don't like the style that I've been developing with the customers (ACTIVE LISTENING).

Margaret: That's right! I'm uncomfortable when you don't use what I've been teaching you. I think it's too soon for you to be developing your own style with our customers (ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION).

Linda: You doubt that I have enough experience to develop my own sales approach (ACTIVE LISTENING). Well, Ms. Stevens, I've tried your method...and I wasn't entirely comfortable with it. The sales approach that I've been using lately I learned in school and it helps me feel more comfortable. I also think that it's been pretty effective (ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION).

Margaret: You feel pretty certain that you're ready to begin developing your own style with the customers (ACTIVE LISTENING). And I'm thinking that you just don't have enough experience to make that kind of decision (ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION). It seems that we both are concerned about increasing sales in the store--we just disagree on the best approach for you to accomplish that. Why don't we meet in my office at five to see if we can come up with some ideas that will help us both feel better about this situation? (CONFLICT IDENTIFICATION).

YOU DON'T LIKE THE STYLE I'VE BEEN DEVELOPING WITH THE CUSTOMERS.
I THINK IT'S TOO SOON FOR YOU TO BE DEVELOPING YOUR OWN STYLE.

Answer "true" or "false" to the statement printed below concerning the conversation between Linda and Margaret, and then turn to the page indicated by your answer.

> Even though Linda and Margaret were able to avoid a breakdown in their relationship by using the skills of active listening and assertive communication, all they were really able to accomplish was to "agree to disagree."
>
> True.....turn to page 164.
>
> False.....turn to page 165.

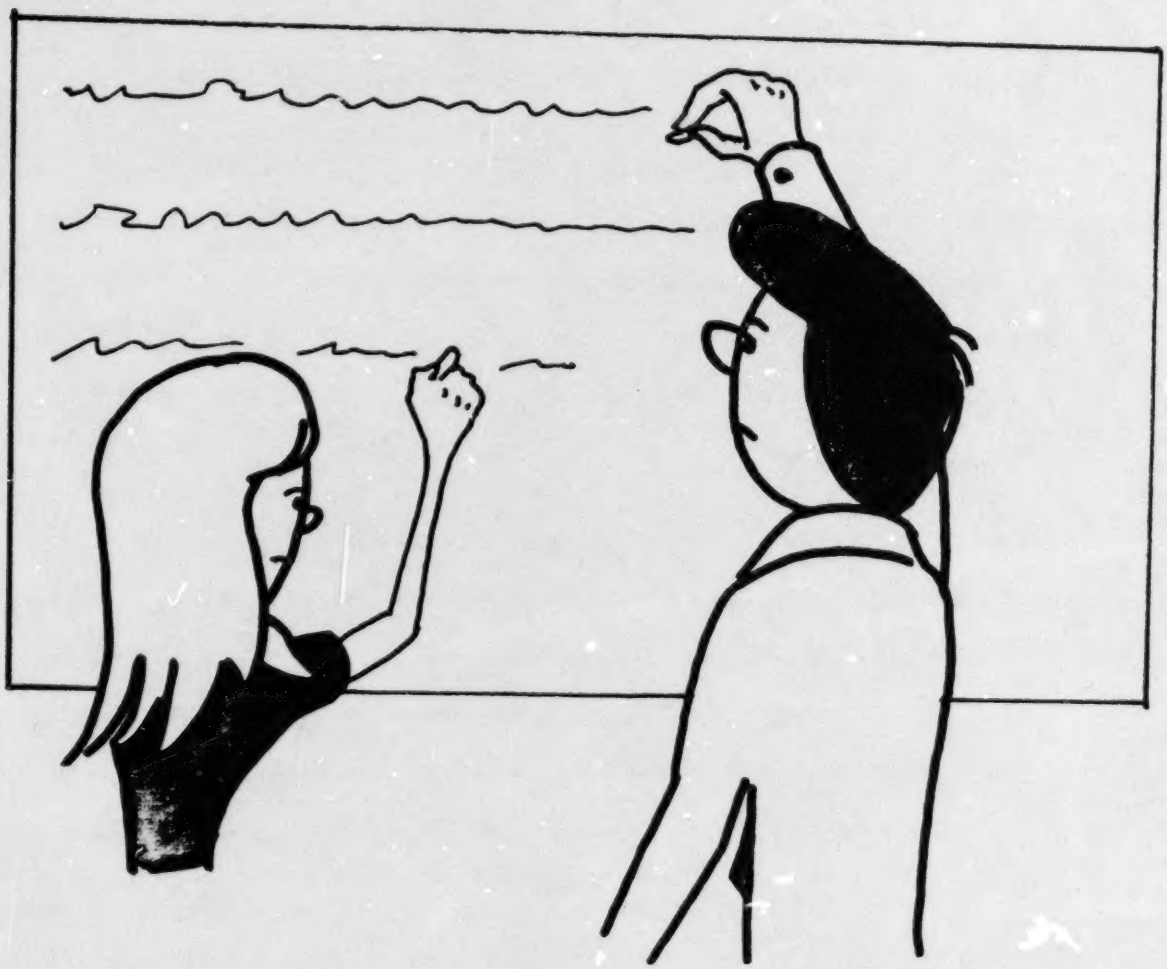
True. No, this answer is incorrect. Although their use of the skills of active listening and assertive communication did help them avoid a preoccupation with winning or losing the conflict, a lot more occurred in their conversation. In fact, they effectively set the stage for finding a mutually satisfying resolution to their conflict. Go back to the question on page 163 and try the other answer to see what else was happening in their conversation.

False. Absolutely! You are correct. Margaret and Linda were able to avoid a breakdown in their working relationship by using the skills of active listening and assertive communication. They also accomplished a good deal more than "agreeing to disagree." In fact, they set the stage for finding a mutually satisfying resolution to their conflict.

Margaret and Linda's effective use of these skills throughout their conversation encouraged them to identify a common goal: increasing sales in the store. Only by using effective communication can we identify these mutual goals or non-conflicting needs. Unless we can identify these goals and needs, neither we nor our co-workers will become particularly motivated to proceed through the remaining stages of the conflict resolution process.

If Margaret did not become aware that Linda shared the goal of increasing sales for the store, Margaret might have resorted to the authority of her position to "settle" the matter. If each person experiencing the conflict is both allowed and encouraged to share his or her thoughts, feelings, and needs involved in the problem, then he or she will become more likely to participate in this process of conflict resolution.

The next step for Linda and Margaret in effectively resolving their conflict is to obtain a list of possible solutions to their problem. Turn now to page 166 to see how this can be accomplished.



S.....Share the thoughts, feelings, and needs involved in the conflict.

O.....OBTAIN A LIST OF POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO THE CONFLICT.

Identification of as many potential solutions to the conflict as possible is important since the longer the list of such resolutions, the more opportunity there will be to obtain a genuinely satisfying resolution for both persons involved. One of the best ways to obtain such a list is to brainstorm as many ideas as possible. Brainstorming involves generating as many ideas as possible which might help resolve the conflict. Turn now to page 167 to learn more about how to effectively brainstorm in this stage of the conflict resolution process.

Effective brainstorming requires that neither person involved in the process justify or evaluate any of the suggested ideas. Why do you think this is important? Choose from among the answers printed below the one which you think best describes why brainstorming should occur without evaluation or justification of the suggested ideas, and then turn to the page indicated to compare your answer with ours.

A. Evaluation of the possible solutions generated by such brainstorming will take place in the next stage of this process of conflict resolution; it is not important in this stage. Turn to the top of page 168.

B. If the persons trying to brainstorm possible solutions feel as though they must justify their ideas, or that their suggestions will be immediately evaluated, they may become hesitant or reluctant to suggest ideas. Turn to the bottom of page 168.

C. No matter how hard the persons who are brainstorming try, they will not be able to avoid immediate justification or evaluation of the proposed solutions. Turn to page 169.

A.....No, this answer is incorrect. It is true that evaluation of the list of possible solutions generated by the brainstorming will occur in the third stage of the conflict resolution process. However, there is an important reason why such evaluation should not occur until the entire list of possible solutions has been generated during this stage in the process. Go back to the question on page 167 and try another answer.

B.....Very good! This answer is correct. Avoiding evaluation during this brainstorming activity is crucial since the people involved in the process may stop volunteering ideas if they feel that their suggestions are being judged. It is important during this stage of conflict resolution to obtain as many ideas as possible. Therefore, anything that may discourage or slow down this brainstorming should be avoided. Turn to page 170 to see how Linda and Margaret might effectively work through this second stage of conflict resolution.

C.....No, this answer is incorrect. It will be possible to the people trying to resolve their conflict to avoid immediate evaluation and justification of their ideas generated in the brainstorming stage. You are correct in realizing that avoiding such evaluation may be difficult and may require modification of some long-standing habits of ineffective conflict resolution. However, there is a very important reason why both persons should try very hard to avoid immediate justification or evaluation of the ideas generated by the brainstorming. Go back to the question on page 167 and try another answer.

Some of the ideas that Linda and Margaret may generate during their brainstorming session include:

1. Linda could return to Margaret's style of sales approach for more training and experience, and a specific date could be set for Linda to begin developing and experimenting with her own approach with the customers.

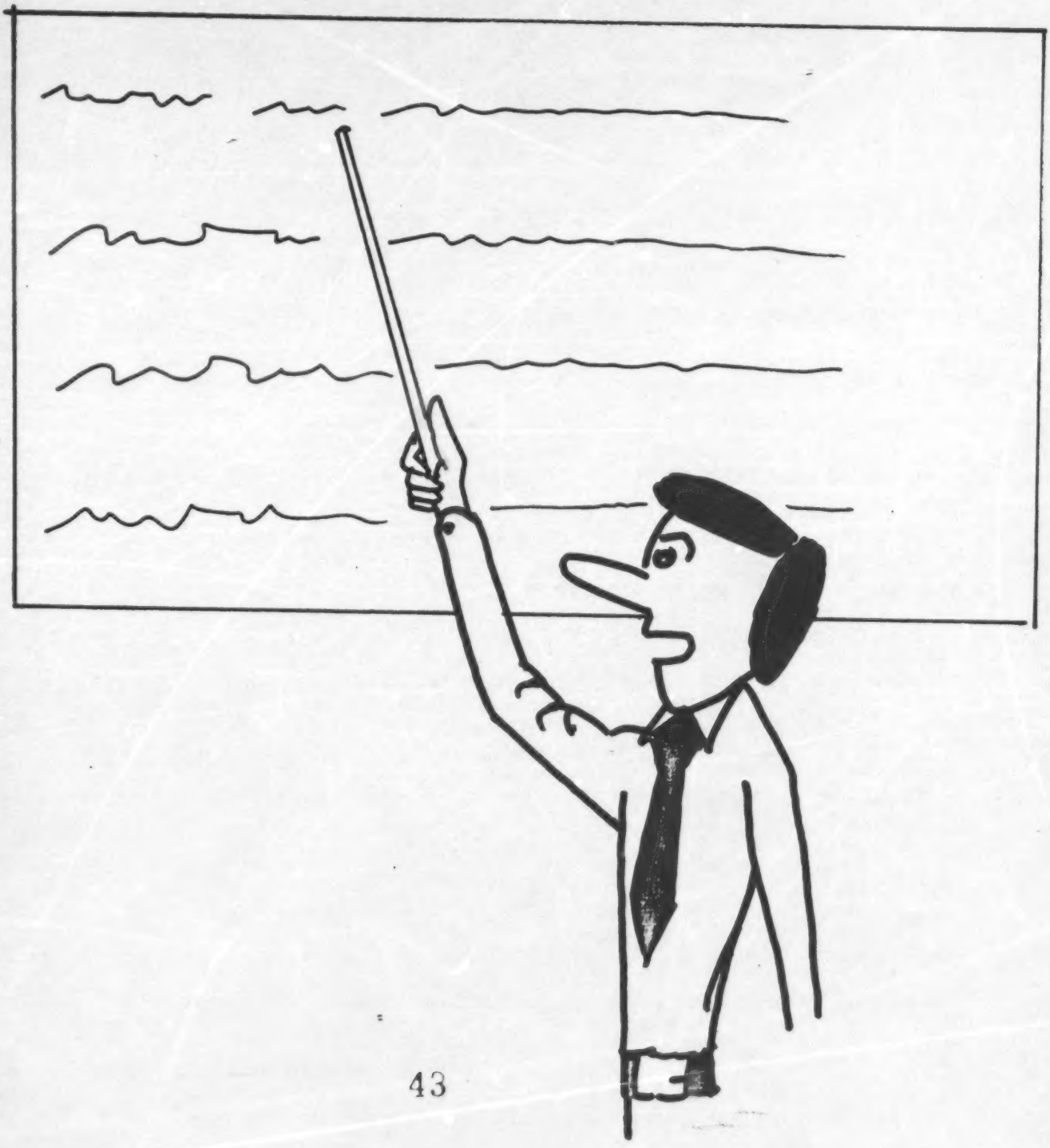
2. Margaret could provide Linda with complete freedom in developing and using her own approach with the store customers.

3. Linda and Margaret could work together at this point to integrate their two styles of approaching sales with the customers, thereby finding one that Linda felt comfortable in using and which satisfied Margaret in its effectiveness.

4. Each of these ideas could be implemented for a brief trial period, and then be evaluated on the basis of the degree to which each was successful in producing sales.

The point here is that the more ideas that are generated by the brainstorming in this stage of conflict resolution, the greater the likelihood that both Margaret and Linda will be genuinely satisfied with the solution to be implemented.

Now turn to page 171 to learn about the third stage of conflict resolution: locating the best possible solution that will satisfy mutual needs.



S.....Share the thoughts, feelings, and needs involved in the conflict.

O.....,.Obtain a list of possible solutions to the conflict.

L.....LOCATE THE BEST POSSIBLE SOLUTION THAT WILL SATISFY MUTUAL NEEDS.

At this point in the process of conflict resolution, evaluation of the list of possible solutions obtained by the brainstorming activity begins. That is, now is the time for both persons to say, "Which of these solutions do you like or dislike? Do you have any preferences? What do you think about each of these possible solutions to our problem?"

Turn now to page 172 to find out more about this third stage of conflict resolution.

Making this stage of conflict resolution work for both persons,--or effectively proceeding through this stage to the next, depends upon eliminating any solution that produces an immediate negative rating from either person, for any reason. Why do you think this is important? Choose from among the answers listed below the one which best describes why the elimination of possible solutions that are immediately evaluated negatively by one or more persons involved in the conflict is important.

A. If one or more persons involved in the conflict resolution process absolutely doesn't like a certain possible solution, and that solution continues to be discussed as a possibility, then the entire conflict resolution process is in jeopardy. Turn to page 173.

B. If both persons really have mutual goals or non-conflicting needs, use the skills of active listening and assertive communication, and are effective during brainstorming, then none of the possible solutions in the list will be evaluated negatively. Turn to the top of page 174.

C. Some possible solutions must be eliminated in order to locate the best solution. Turn to the bottom of page 174.

A.....You are correct! The elimination of any possible solutions that produce a negative reaction from anyone involved in the conflict resolution process is very important. Remember that during the previous stage of conflict resolution, evaluation of the ideas generated by the brainstorming was not allowed. If someone involved in the process feels negatively about a particular idea, the other person's working to persuade or to argue for that solution will indeed risk the entire conflict resolution process.

For example, suppose that Margaret absolutely resists and refuses to discuss the idea that Linda could immediately develop and adopt her own style of approaching sales with their customers. Not allowing Margaret the option (or Linda, for that matter, should she feel similarly about another particular idea) to dismiss that possible solution could risk her aborting the entire conflict resolution process, and her resorting to the authority of her position to settle the matter. Now turn to page 175.

B.....No, this answer is incorrect. The skills of active listening and assertive communication were employed during the first stage of conflict resolution in order to determine the common goals or the non-conflicting needs of the people involved in the conflict. Effective identification of the conflict by these people does not mean that there will be complete agreement between them as to how to solve the problem. And, during the brainstorming stage of the process, evaluation of the possible solutions was not allowed in order to generate as long a list as possible. Therefore, at this point in the process of conflict resolution there may remain disagreement concerning some of the possible solutions. Go back to the question on page 172 and try another answer.

C.....You are correct in realizing that the list of possible solutions to the conflict must be narrowed in order to find the best possible solution that will satisfy mutual needs. But there is another very important reason why potential solutions which are immediately evaluated negatively by one of the persons involved should be eliminated. Go back to the question on page 172 and try another answer.

Any discussion concerning the best possible solution to satisfy mutual needs in the conflict situation will very clearly involve an examination of the merits of all of the possible solutions that have not been immediately eliminated. You may have already guessed that during this discussion, the skills of active listening and assertive communication will become essential once again. Do you know why? Answer "true" or "false" to the statement printed below which provides an answer to this question, and then turn to the page indicated by your selected answer.

Active listening and assertive communication will be essential in determining the best possible solution since evaluation of ideas involves people's feelings.

True.....turn to page 176.

False.....turn to page 177.

True. Terrific! You are correct. When we evaluate various solutions to our problems we take into account our feelings about such ideas. Therefore, in trying to find the best possible solution to our conflict with others, the skills of active listening and assertive communication become very important once more. Only by effectively using these skills can we communicate our feelings and needs to the other person and convey to that person that we recognize and understand his or her feelings and needs.

Many times, we will discover two or more possible solutions which seem equally attractive in resolving our conflicts. What can we do if this occurs? One way is to discuss with the other person what might happen if this or that solution were implemented. For example, we might begin the discussion by asking the other person, "If we tried this idea, what do you think would happen? Would we both feel satisfied? Are there any flaws? Where might we fail if we tried this solution?" If you and the other person can answer these questions, and effectively employ the skills of active listening and assertive communication, a superior solution to your conflict is likely to emerge.

Turn now to page 178 to learn more about this third stage of conflict resolution.

False. Remember that when we are experiencing a conflict with another at work there will always be feelings and needs involved. This is especially true when we are trying to evaluate possible solutions to that problem. As you have learned previously, the best form of communication in such cases requires the effective use of the skills of active listening and assertive communication. Go back to the question on page 176 and try the other answer.

You may be wondering at this point: "What should I do if all of the solutions are eliminated or if none of them is attractive?" Choose from among the answers listed below the one which you think is the best course for you and the other person to follow in such a situation, and then turn to the page indicated by your answer.

A. Give in and let the other person have his or her way. Turn to page 179.

B. Begin arguing for the solution which looks best to you. Turn to page 180.

C. Turn back to an earlier stage of the conflict resolution process and try again. Turn to page 181.

A.....No, this answer is incorrect. If this third stage of conflict resolution seems to stall, and you abandon the process by letting the other person "win," you will accomplish little that is positive or constructive. By this point you have come a long way in your process of finding a mutually acceptable resolution to your conflict using the skills of active listening and assertive communication. Giving in to the other person at this point may enable you to find a "quick fix" to your problem, but your working relationship will not improve as a result of resorting to the "win-lose" style. In fact, your relationship may even weaken since you may experience some resentment in giving in to the other person; you may even think to yourself, "Just wait until next time--I'll win that one!" Go back to the question on page 178 and try another answer.

B.....No, this answer is incorrect. Resorting to the "win-lose" style of conflict resolution by arguing for the solution you like best if things seem to stall at this point will serve to negate all that you and your co-worker have gained by active listening and communicating assertively. The foundation of improving your working relationship as a result of resolving the conflict successfully has already been established. It seems unlikely that you will genuinely want to waste the very positive and constructive effort by arguing your view and attempting to "win" the conflict. Go back to the question on page 178 and try another answer.

C.....Very good! You have correctly realized that if all of the possible solutions on your list have been eliminated, or if none of them seems sufficiently attractive to you or your co-worker, then you need to turn back to an earlier stage of the process. For example, you and your co-worker may not have accurately determined the common goals or the non-conflicting needs in your situation. Further active listening and communicating assertively with each other will provide you with a more solid foundation upon which to base the next stage of the conflict resolution process. Or, perhaps you and your co-worker did not sufficiently brainstorm enough possible solutions to your problem. Returning to that stage may be helpful in generating more attractive solutions.

This is not to say that you will always locate perfect resolutions to your conflict situations at work. You and your co-worker are subject to a variety of circumstances at your job over which you have little or no control. Therefore, try to locate the <u>best</u> solution that will satisfy your mutual needs. If you must return to an earlier stage of the process, remember that the skills of active listening and assertive communication will remotivate you and your co-worker to find the best possible solution. Now turn to page 182 to begin learning about the fourth stage of conflict resolution: validating the conflict-resolving process by implementing the solution.

S.....Share the thoughts, feelings, and needs involved in the conflict.

O.....Obtain a list of possible solutions to the conflict.

L.....Locate the best possible solution that will satisfy mutual needs.

V.....VALIDATE THE CONFLICT-RESOLVING PROCESS BY IMPLEMENTING THE SOLUTION.

Validating the conflict-resolving process by implementing the solution is very important. Very clearly, putting into action the decision that we and our co-workers jointly select is the only way that the conflict will be resolved. Problems won't go away if we merely talk about them--we must do something about them.

Now turn to page 183 to find out more about this fourth stage of conflict resolution.

SOLUTION

In addition to putting into action the solution that we and our co-workers jointly select to resolve the conflict, there is another reason why validating the conflict-resolving process is important. Let's use the situation between Linda and Margaret to illustrate this point. Suppose that they both agreed to work together to find the best aspects of Margaret's style of sales with Linda's approach, and then allow Linda to use the new integrated approach for one month. After that period, they will examine the new approach in terms of its sales effectiveness and the degree to which Linda feels comfortable with it. Now, suppose further that each time Margaret and Linda schedule such a meeting, Margaret either forgets or cancels it at the last minute.

How do you think Linda is likely to feel? Answer "true" or "false" to the statement printed below that provides one possible answer to this question, and then turn to the page indicated.

> Even though the actual solving of her problem has been postponed, Linda is likely to feel good about the conflict resolution process with Margaret since at least they were able to talk things out.
>
> True.....turn to page 184.
>
> False.....turn to page 185.

True. No, Linda is not very likely to feel satisfied with the outcome of her conflict resolution process with Margaret. In fact, she may even feel more frustration than she felt before working on her problem with Margaret. True, the skills of active listening and assertive communication did strengthen their working relationship. But, consistent with the old adage that describes talk as cheap, Linda might feel that while Margaret was willing to trust her enough to talk, Margaret was actually neither sufficiently interested nor trustful to follow through on their discussion in terms of acting upon their joint decision. Following through on our verbal commitments to others at work is always important; clearly, such action is especially crucial in the conflict resolution process.

Go back to the question on page 183 and try another answer.

False. Yes! Linda is indeed likely to feel frustrated and even resentful about the way Margaret was willing to talk with her, but apparently not sufficiently interested or trustful to ACT upon their joint decision. Validating, or "confirming the importance of" the conflict resolution process by each person involved means acting upon the commitment each person makes in the process. Words, indeed, can be "cheap;" action makes such words truly valuable.

When you and your co-workers arrive at this stage in the process of conflict resolution, you may ask each other, "What do we need in order to get started? Who will do what; what is each of us responsible for?" Putting your joint decision into clear terms, defining standards for performance, and specifying every detail involved in the resolution will insure its effective implementation. Additionally, since putting your joint decision into action is a task which you and your co-workers will have to accomplish together, you and they are likely to become even more motivated in seeing that the solution works. Once again, such a joint effort not only greatly enhances the chances of your selected resolution being effective, but it also strengthens your relationship with that person.

Now turn to page 186 to begin learning about the final stage of the conflict resolution process: evaluating the implemented solution by following up on it.

S.....Share the thoughts, feelings, and needs involved in the conflict.

O.....Obtain a list of possible solutions to the conflict.

L.....Locate the best solution that will satisfy mutual needs.

V.....Validate the conflict-resolving process by implementing the solution.

E.....<u>EVALUATE THE IMPLEMENTED SOLUTION BY FOLLOWING UP ON IT</u>.

Unfortunately, none of us is an effective predictor of the future: for a variety of reasons, the solution which we and our co-workers implement to resolve a conflict may or may not prove effective. Commitments that were accepted in the previous stage may not always be possible to meet for reasons which could not be initially anticipated. The world of work is a constantly changing, unpredictable environment. Finally, we are all human and so we will always make mistakes.

Therefore, evaluating the implemented solution by following up on it serves two purposes. First, such evaluation will help you and your co-worker to make sure that both of you are still satisfied with the specific outcome of your conflict resolution process. But evaluating the implemented solution meets another very important need as a final stage in the conflict resolution process.

Turn now to page 187 for an exercise concerning this fifth stage of conflict resolution.

Choose from among the answers listed below the one you think best describes the importance of followup of the implemented solution, and then turn to the page indicated by your answer.

A. Evaluation via followup is a good way to check for new conflicts with your co-workers. Turn to page 188.

B. Evaluation via followup renews the relationship strengthening process by indicating both interest and commitment to what was begun by the resolution of the conflict. Turn to page 189.

C. Evaluation via followup is an effective method for making sure that the other person is meeting his or her commitment to the conflict resolution outcomes. Turn to page 190.

A.....This answer is only partially correct. Evaluation of the implemented solution via followup may indeed unearth new conflicts with your co-workers. Having effectively worked through the stages of conflict resolution, you and they will be in a very good position to effectively deal with this new problem. Your diligent and effective use of the skills of active listening and assertive communication will very clearly help you identify and resolve new conflicts. However, this is not the whole story to evaluation of implemented resolutions to old conflicts. Go back to the question on page 187 and try another answer.

B.....Terrific! You have perceptively realized that followup of implemented resolutions conveys to our co-workers a renewal of our commitment. In a sense, by following up on the conflict resolution process, we will be communicating to our co-workers, "What we accomplished last week (or last month) concerning the problem we had was very important to me. Not only do I want to make certain that our adopted solution is working for us both, but I also want to make sure that we are still making positive and constructive gains in our relationship."

Some of the questions you might ask your co-workers in evaluating the implemented resolution to your conflict are: "Are you still satisfied with our solution? How do you think things have worked out? Do you think that we've made progress?"

Turn to page 191 to find out more about following up on the solutions you and your co-worker implemented to resolve your conflict.

C.....No, this answer is incorrect. Remember that this entire process of conflict resolution depends upon and builds trust among you and your co-workers. Using this final stage of the process to check up on the other person very clearly signifies mistrust. And since your co-worker will be likely to perceive that you don't trust his or her intentions to implement your jointly-selected resolution to the conflict, he or she will probably become less motivated to carry out your mutual decision, and resort to a "win-lose" approach to finally settle the matter. Turn back to the question on page 187 and try another answer.

You may discover that your co-worker is dissatisfied with the resolution which has been implemented, even though he or she seemed acceptant when you initially adopted the solution. Do you think such an occurrence would signify a negation of your efforts and a failure of the conflict resolution process? Answer "true" or "false" to the statement printed below that provides one answer to this question.

> If the other person expresses dissatisfaction with the outcome of the conflict resolution process during the evaluation stage, it would indicate that the process had failed at one point, and that a return to that stage is necessary.

True.....turn to page 192.

False.....turn to page 193.

True. If your co-worker did express dissatisfaction with the specific solution which you both adopted in the conflict resolution process, it may signify that somewhere along the line in that process one or both of you made an error, or were otherwise unable to anticipate the consequences of the selected resolution. Returning to a particular stage in the process would, in this case, indeed be necessary. But such a realization does not necessarily signal a failure of the process. Even though a specific resolution proved ineffective, the relationship between you and the other person will have improved; in fact, your followup activity will convey to the other your commitment to strengthening that relationship. Therefore, even if you must now find another resolution to the problem that will satisfy both of you, your efforts in the conflict resolution process are anything but a failure!

Now turn back to the question on page 191 and try the other answer.

True. If your co-worker did express dissatisfaction with the specific solution which you both adopted in the conflict resolution process, it may signify that somewhere along the line in that process one or both of you made an error, or were otherwise unable to anticipate the consequences of the selected resolution. Returning to a particular stage in the process would, in this case, indeed be necessary. But such a realization does not necessarily signal a failure of the process. Even though a specific resolution proved ineffective, the relationship between you and the other person will have improved; in fact, your followup activity will convey to the other your commitment to strengthening that relationship. Therefore, even if you must now find another resolution to the problem that will satisfy both of you, your efforts in the conflict resolution process are anything but a failure!

Now turn back to the question on page 191 and try the other answer.

False. Terrific! You have understood that our needs and goals at work will change. The beauty of this process of conflict resolution is that it is relationship-oriented rather than solely problem-oriented. Instead of generating decisions that are locked in concrete, thereby ignoring the human quality of us all, this process of conflict resolution offers a creative method that allows us to meet changing goals and needs. If a solution generated by this method no longer accomplishes our goals, it can be discarded and another located and implemented. Resolving conflicts in such a way that both solves a specific problem and improves working relationships, therefore, involves both an awareness of and a commitment to an attitude that subordinates solutions, decision, and policies to the feelings, needs, and goals of human beings.

We hope that you have gained insight into the importance of effective communication to career success as a result of reading the programmed text and listening to the tapes. As we discussed earlier in the program, these ideas and skills are not magical or mysterious. They will require a great deal of work and practice on your part in order to produce positive results in your work environment. But if you are diligent in working to improve your communication skills, you will be both surprised and delighted at the positive impact they will have on your relationships with others at work.